United Nations S/2014/665

Security Council

Distr.: General
12 September 2014

Original: English

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force for the period from 29 May to 3 September 2014

I. Introduction

1. The present report gives an account of the activities of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) during the past three months, pursuant to the mandate contained in Security Council resolution 350 (1974) and extended by subsequent resolutions, most recently through resolution 2163 (2014).

II. Situation in the area and activities of the Force

2. At the time of writing, the situation in the UNDOF area of operation is evolving rapidly and remains volatile, with heavy fighting continuing between the Syrian armed forces and the armed members of the opposition and other armed groups in the area of separation. Several UNDOF peacekeepers serving with the Fijian battalion were detained by armed elements. At the present time, no additional information on their status or location has been established.*

3. During the reporting period, the ceasefire between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic generally was maintained, albeit in a continuously volatile environment attributable to the ongoing conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic and despite a number of significant violations of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement by Israeli and Syrian forces, signed in 1974, set out below. Several incidents of firing across the ceasefire line occurred, resulting in casualties. Of particular note, on 22 June, fire from the Bravo side killed a civilian and injured others on the Alpha side and, in retaliation, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) fired into the area of separation and limitation on the Bravo side, resulting in the death and injury of Syrian armed forces personnel. The Syrian armed forces significantly increased the number of personnel and equipment deployed inside the area of separation and carried out military activities and security operations against armed members of the opposition, at times in response to offensives carried out by the armed members of the opposition. Inside the area of separation, the presence of the Syrian armed forces and military equipment, as well as any other armed personnel and military

* As the present report was going to press, the 45 UNDOF peacekeepers were released unharmed on 11 September. They were brought to position 80, from where they crossed to the Alpha side. Subsequently, the peacekeepers returned to the Bravo side and Camp Faouar.

14-60580 (E) 120914

Please recycle

equipment, is in violation of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement. As underscored by the Security Council in its resolution 2163 (2014), there should be no military activity of any kind in the area of separation.

4. On the morning of 27 August, approximately 100 armed members of several armed groups, including Jabhat al-Nusra, launched an attack on Syrian armed forces positions at the Bravo gate and in the area of Quneitra in the area of separation. UNDOF evacuated its personnel from the Charlie gate to Camp Ziouani. Later that day, UNDOF observed armed elements removing three United Nations vehicles left behind at the position, as well as looting equipment and personal effects at the position. Simultaneous to the attack on Quneitra and the Bravo gate, armed groups also engaged Syrian armed forces positions in the area of Tal al-Kurum and Jaba. There were several incidents when fire, including mortar rounds, landed close to United Nations positions, as a result of which United Nations personnel in positions affected by the fighting, as well as those in Camp Ziouani, entered shelters. Following several hours of heavy fighting, the armed elements gained control of the Bravo gate and most parts of Quneitra.

5. On the afternoon of 27 August, eight armed fighters forcibly entered position 27 while UNDOF personnel were in the shelter. The armed elements demanded that the United Nations personnel vacate the position in order to avoid injury in the ongoing fighting. The UNDOF personnel refused and remained in the shelter while fighting in Quneitra continued. The Force Commander spoke to the leader of the armed fighters and requested that the armed elements vacate the position and not harm the United Nations peacekeepers. The armed fighters remained inside the United Nations premises, however, and continued their attack on the Syrian armed forces through the night, including from within position 27. A small group of armed elements ransacked the position and took United Nations and personal items from it. They also put on United Nations uniforms and blue berets taken from the accommodations of the personnel.

6. As a result of fire landing inside position 60, two buildings caught fire. Owing to the continuing fighting in the area, United Nations personnel had to remain in the shelter and could not extinguish the fire. The fire completely destroyed both buildings.

7. In the course of the fighting on 27 August, one IDF soldier and one Israeli civilian were injured on the Alpha side by fire that landed across the ceasefire line. IDF subsequently responded by firing on a Syrian armed forces position, approximately 3 km from Camp Faouar on the Bravo side. The Senior Syrian Arab Delegate informed UNDOF that one artillery weapon was destroyed.

8. On the morning of 28 August, the armed fighters, who had remained at position 27 overnight, demanded that the UNDOF personnel leave the position, leaving behind their vehicles. They said that UNDOF personnel would be moved in vehicles of the armed fighters towards the Alpha gate. Approximately 300 armed elements were seen outside the perimeter of the position. UNDOF readied the Force Reserve for possible relocation of the United Nations personnel; however, the position personnel were given a 10-minute deadline by the armed elements to move out. The Force Commander therefore gave orders for the United Nations personnel to vacate the position. The armed fighters took the weapons of the UNDOF personnel and then transported the UNDOF personnel to the area of the Bravo gate on the understanding that they would be allowed to cross to the Alpha side.

However, a representative of the armed elements near the Alpha gate on the Bravo side, who said that he was waiting for the arrival of the detained peacekeepers, subsequently informed UNDOF that they had been taken elsewhere. UNDOF then observed vehicles resembling those of the armed elements that had been present at position 27 moving in the direction of position 60, but lost sight of them.

9. Armed elements subsequently moved to United Nations positions 68 in Ruihinah and 69 in Braika, with at least two Fijian peacekeepers, and demanded that United Nations personnel at the two positions give up their weapons in order for the 45 detained UNDOF peacekeepers to be released. When the United Nations personnel did not hand over their weapons, the armed members placed command-detonated explosive devices around the two positions to prevent the United Nations personnel from leaving, and threatened to attack the positions. As a precautionary measure, to prevent more United Nations positions and personnel from coming under siege, UNDOF evacuated its personnel from positions 80 to 85 and subsequently to the Alpha side. On the evening of 28 August, armed elements attempted to force their way through the gate of position 69. United Nations personnel fired warning shots and the armed elements withdrew.

10. Heavy fighting between the Syrian armed forces and armed elements continued on 29 August in the central part of the area of separation. Following some rounds falling close to position 60, UNDOF evacuated the position. In the early morning of 30 August, armed elements detonated at least one explosive they had placed outside the gate of position 68 and began attacking the position. United Nations personnel at the position fired in return. The exchange of fire lasted for several hours, at which point UNDOF managed to establish an agreement with the armed elements on a ceasefire lasting until the next day. No injuries were incurred among the United Nations personnel during the exchange of fire. The situation at position 69 was relatively quiet that morning and UNDOF was able to evacuate the personnel to the Alpha side. At midday, after firing took place in the vicinity of observation post 52, the Observer Group Golan military observers, and UNDOF personnel who had been placed at the observation post to provide additional security, also were evacuated.

11. On the evening of 30 August, UNDOF observed between 100 and 120 armed elements arrive in the vicinity of Ruihinah from areas farther south. As a precautionary measure, the UNDOF evacuated its personnel from observation post 56. During the night, United Nations personnel from position 68 left the position on foot and moved across the technical fence to the Alpha side. UNDOF maintains a reinforced presence at United Nations position 80 near al-Rafid.

12. Since the fierce fighting that commenced on 27 August, which led to the detention of the UNDOF peacekeepers from the Fijian contingent and the siege of two UNDOF positions, the UNDOF Force Commander has been in regular close contact with the Senior Syrian Arab Delegate and IDF. Both parties provided full support to UNDOF in ensuring the safe evacuation of its peacekeepers from positions that had to be vacated as a result of the ongoing fighting. The UNDOF Force Commander as well as Secretariat staff have been in ongoing contact with Member States that may have influence over the armed groups in order to effect the immediate, unconditional and safe release of the members of the Fijian contingent.

13. In the context of the clashes between the Syrian armed forces and armed members of the opposition and other armed groups, there were multiple incidents of

firing from the Bravo side across the ceasefire line and several incidents of fire from the Alpha side to the Bravo side. On the morning of 2 June, four rockets were fired from the vicinity of Camp Faouar in a north-northwestern direction. Two vehicles with mounted multiple-launch rocket systems were seen speeding away from the firing location. Shortly thereafter, IDF informed UNDOF that they had detected a threat near Camp Faouar and that IDF would retaliate. UNDOF personnel immediately took shelter. The first artillery round fired by IDF landed within a distance of 100 m of Camp Faouar as the shelter alarm was sounded and United Nations personnel were still rushing to the shelters. Another three rounds landed within 1 km of the camp. IDF subsequently informed UNDOF that one rocket had impacted west of the ceasefire line, in proximity to one of its positions. A significant amount of shrapnel and debris fell into Camp Faouar. There was no injury to United Nations personnel, but slight damage to United Nations property. The UNDOF leadership was in immediate contact with both parties to prevent an escalation of the situation. The Senior Syrian Arab Delegate informed UNDOF that the Syrian armed forces were not involved in the incident and stated that armed elements might have infiltrated the area overnight to fire against the pro-Government village of Hadar and instil fear among the population ahead of the presidential elections scheduled for 3 June. IDF informed UNDOF that it had retaliated because it had assessed that Israel was being targeted. UNDOF carried out an investigation into the incident, which showed that the rockets that landed in the area of Hadar and the one that landed on the Alpha side were of the same calibre and type, and most likely originated from the same weapon. UNDOF protested to both parties the firing of rockets across the ceasefire line in violation of the Disengagement Agreement. UNDOF also expressed grave concern to IDF about the firing close to Camp Faouar, which placed United Nations personnel in serious danger.

14. On 22 June, United Nations personnel observed an explosion in the vicinity of observation post 52 that hit a vehicle on the IDF patrol path west of the technical fence. One Israeli teenager was killed and four other people were wounded. IDF retaliated with several tank rounds onto Syrian armed forces positions in Quneitra, in the area of separation, in close proximity to United Nations position 27. IDF informed UNDOF of the retaliation after the fact and suggested that United Nations personnel deployed between Ufaniyah in the north and Bir Ajam in the south go into shelters. United Nations personnel remained in shelters until IDF notified UNDOF that no further firing would take place that day, but cautioned UNDOF to minimize movement in the area of separation. Shortly after midnight on 23 June, IDF conducted an airstrike on nine locations on the Bravo side, dropping several bombs in the general area of Camp Faouar. United Nations personnel in the camp went into shelter. The UNDOF investigation into the 22 June firing indicated that a missile had been fired from the general area east of Ruihinah across the ceasefire line. The Syrian authorities informed UNDOF that four Syrian armed forces personnel were killed and nine more were wounded by IDF retaliatory fire. The Senior Syrian Arab Delegate maintained that the missile that killed the teenager on 22 June was not fired by the Syrian armed forces. The UNDOF investigation further showed that the IDF response fire on 23 June came closest to Camp Faouar when it targeted two Syrian armed forces positions, located approximately 2 km from the camp.

15. On 5 June, IDF informed UNDOF that three mortars were fired on the Bravo side and landed on the Alpha side following the announcement of the results of the presidential election. On 15 June, IDF informed UNDOF that a rocket had landed on

the Alpha side, in the vicinity of Majdal Shams. The UNDOF investigation confirmed that a rocket had been fired to the Alpha side from the Bravo side. On 7 July, UNDOF heard three explosions in the vicinity of Masada on the Alpha side. IDF responded with five rounds of fire in the vicinity of Bayt Jinn in the area of limitation on the Bravo side. On 13 July, unidentified elements fired one rocket from a position north of Camp Faouar, which landed across the ceasefire line in a mine field in the vicinity of United Nations outpost 37B. IDF retaliated with five missiles into the area of limitation on the Bravo side, hitting one Syrian armed forces position located 3 km south of Camp Faouar. According to the Syrian authorities, one Syrian armed forces soldier was killed and two others were wounded. Shortly after the launch of the rocket from the Bravo side, the Senior Syrian Arab Delegate had informed UNDOF of a rocket having been fired by armed elements from north of UNDOF headquarters in the direction of Hadar village. On 14 July, unidentified elements fired two rockets from the same location north of Camp Faouar, which impacted on the outskirts of El Rom village on the Alpha side. IDF fired two artillery rounds at a location 2 km east of Camp Faouar in the area of limitation. IDF had informed UNDOF prior to the retaliatory fire and UNDOF personnel at Camp Faouar went into shelters. On 20 July, the Senior Syrian Arab Delegate informed UNDOF that a shell had been fired by armed elements towards the Alpha side. IDF subsequently confirmed that a round had landed approximately 3 km west of Majdal Shams. United Nations personnel on the ground did not observe the firing. IDF did not retaliate. On 23 July, a tank round landed on the Alpha side close to United Nations observation post 51, causing damage to the perimeter fence of the post. On 24 August, unidentified elements fired four rockets from approximately 4 km north of Camp Faouar in the area of limitation on the Bravo side, which landed in Ayn Ziwan on the Alpha side and injured one civilian. On 27 August, one mortar round fired from the Bravo side injured one IDF soldier 2 km from the Alpha line. IDF responded with fire on a Syrian armed forces position approximately 3 km south of Camp Faouar. In addition, there were numerous occasions when small arms and anti-aircraft fire exchanged between the Syrian armed forces and the armed members of the opposition and other armed groups in the area of Quneitra and Al-Qahtaniyah landed on the Alpha side.

16. During the night of 29 July and early on 30 July, United Nations personnel at observation post 51 heard rounds passing close by their post and explosions nearby. UNDOF informed the Senior Syrian Arab Delegate of the firing in the area of observation post 51 and urged him to relay to Syrian armed forces on the ground to stop the firing, as fire had landed on the Alpha side and close to the United Nations observation post. The Senior Syrian Arab Delegate confirmed to UNDOF that the Syrian armed forces had fired artillery as part of ongoing clashes with armed elements and that all rounds fired by the Syrian armed forces had landed on the Bravo side. The following morning, one unexploded artillery round was found in proximity to the ceasefire line and the perimeter of United Nations observation post 51. The unexploded ordnance had penetrated the tarmac of the road leading to the observation post, where it remained. The round was a 122 mm dual purpose (anti-armour and anti-personnel) improved conventional ammunition artillery round of a type usually containing around 30 sub-munitions. The UNDOF investigation found that, on the basis of the direction and angle of impact of the projectile in the tarmac, the round was fired from an area that is bounded by Khan Arnabeh in the south-west, Jaba in the south and Camp Faouar in the north.

17. Crossing of the ceasefire line by civilians, primarily shepherds, was observed on an almost daily basis by United Nations personnel on the ground. On 29 May and 29 July, IDF fired warning shots towards shepherds who had crossed the ceasefire line. Throughout the reporting period, UNDOF frequently observed armed members of the opposition interacting with IDF across the ceasefire line in the vicinity of United Nations position 85. UNDOF observed armed members of the opposition transferring 47 wounded persons from the Bravo side across the ceasefire line to IDF, and IDF on the Alpha side handing over 43 treated individuals to the armed members of the opposition on the Bravo side.

18. UNDOF protested all firings across the ceasefire line to the Senior Syrian Arab Delegate and IDF. All incidents of firing into the area of separation and across the ceasefire line, as well as the crossing by individuals of the ceasefire line, are violations of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement.

19. In employing its best efforts to maintain the ceasefire and see that it is scrupulously observed, as prescribed by the Disengagement of Forces Agreement, UNDOF reports all breaches of the ceasefire line. The Force Commander maintained regular and close contact with IDF and the Senior Syrian Arab Delegate. During periods of heightened tensions, as well as during and in the immediate aftermath of firing incidents across the ceasefire line, the Force Commander was in ongoing close contact with both parties to the Disengagement Agreement to prevent an escalation of the situation across the ceasefire line. He also engaged closely with both sides to find mechanisms, including the exchange of information about civilian activities close to the ceasefire line, that could contribute to preventing future incidents.

20. Throughout the reporting period, the heavy firing and intermittent armed clashes between the Syrian armed forces and armed members of the opposition and other armed groups continued in the UNDOF area of operation. In the northern area of limitation, shelling and explosions were observed in the areas of Mazra'at Bayt Jinn and Bayt Jinn, Mughur al-Mir and Baytima, the intensity of which increased significantly at the end of August. The local truce arrangement in the areas of Jabbata, Ufaniyah, Trunje and Khan Arnabah, in the northern and central parts of the area of separation, generally held despite sporadic firing from Syrian armed forces positions in the areas surrounding the villages. Fighting remained most intense in the central and southern parts of the area of separation and in the area of limitation just east of it. The presence and use of heavy weapons and equipment by the Syrian armed forces and, to a somewhat lesser degree, by the armed members of the opposition and other armed groups, continued. The Syrian armed forces carried out airstrikes, mostly in the southern part of the area of limitation around the towns of Nawa and Jaseem, as well as in some areas close to the area of separation, and on one occasion, on 27 July, in the area of separation in the vicinity of al-Rafid village. On 25 August, UNDOF personnel observed Syrian armed forces firing at an unmanned aerial vehicle flying in the vicinity of Jaba in the area of limitation.

21. Early on 31 May, Syrian armed forces launched a counter-attack on Al-Qahtaniyah village in the area of separation, with heavy tank fire and artillery shelling from several of their positions. The village had come under the control of the armed members of the opposition and other armed groups at the beginning of May. Approximately 100 Syrian armed forces soldiers moved in on the village and heavy clashes ensued between the soldiers and other armed groups. The first attack

was combined with a second on the neighbouring village of Al-Samdaniyah. The armed groups repelled the attacks on both villages. Until the 27 August attack by armed groups on the Bravo gate and Quneitra, the two sides continued to exchange fire in the area of Al-Qahtaniyah and Quneitra on a daily basis without significant changes to the military situation on the ground. On 15 July, Syrian armed forces again initiated activities in the area of separation when they deployed on and around Tal al-Kurum and took control of Al-Samdaniyah from the armed members of the opposition.

22. On 9 and 10 July, armed groups carried out a ground offensive against Syrian armed forces positions located at Zbedah al-Sharkia, Nab' as-Sakhr, Kammuniyah and Majdotiyah, in the area of limitation. Armed groups took control of eight Syrian armed forces positions. In the period since the initial attack, the Syrian armed forces have regained control of two of the positions they initially lost, and continue to shell areas that remain in the hands of the armed opposition and other armed groups. At the time of the present report, the two sides remain in a standoff of forces. The armed members of the opposition have enlarged their area of control up to 5 km east of the Bravo line.

23. Concomitantly with these developments, the incidents of firing close to United Nations positions increased. On numerous occasions during periods of fighting between the Syrian armed forces and armed members of the opposition and other armed groups, rounds landed inside or in close proximity to United Nations positions, at times forcing United Nations personnel to take shelter. On 15 July, the Syrian armed forces deployed soldiers with tanks and anti-aircraft weapons on Tal al-Kurum, a hill in the area of separation in the immediate vicinity of United Nations observation post 56, in violation of the Disengagement Agreement. The deployment exposed United Nations personnel at observation post 56 to further risk of being caught in the crossfire and resulted in frequent incidents of firing close to and into the observation post. On 22 July, owing to the evolving security situation, UNDOF soldiers temporarily relieved the unarmed military observers of the Observer Group Golan at observation post 56. After their deployment on and around Tal al-Kurum, Syrian armed forces and armed members of the opposition and other armed groups frequently exchanged fire. Multiple incidents of rounds landing close to the observation post occurred, and forced UNDOF personnel to take shelter. On 8 August, more than 70 mortar rounds landed on Tal al-Kurum, two of which landed inside the premises of the United Nations observation post and others immediately adjacent to the perimeter fence. The rounds damaged a United Nations vehicle and the windows of the observation post, as well as the gate and the two water tanks; water pipes were damaged as a result of firing close to the observation post on 17 July.

24. The UNDOF Force Commander repeatedly protested to the Senior Syrian Arab Delegate, urging the Syrian authorities to remove the Syrian armed forces personnel and their weapons. The Syrian armed forces increased and fortified their presence on and around Tal al-Kurum with more than 100 troops, earth mounds and pre-fabricated shelters to house the troops, and deployed two tanks, two anti-aircraft weapons and three heavy machine guns mounted on vehicles at a distance of 200 to 300 m from the observation post towards the bottom of the hill. UNDOF received several demands from representatives of the armed groups that Syrian armed forces leave the position around the observation post; if they failed to do so, the groups threatened to launch attacks against Syrian armed forces as well as UNDOF at

position 68 and observation post 56. The armed groups subsequently withdrew their threat against UNDOF. The Senior Syrian Arab Delegate informed the Force Commander on 19 July that a senior-level Government committee had decided that the Syrian armed forces would be withdrawn from Tal al-Kurum after some time. The Syrian authorities informed the Force Commander that the Syrian armed forces deployment was occasioned by the threat of an attack by armed groups on the towns of Khan Arnabeh and al-Baath in the central part of the UNDOF area of operation. At the time of reporting, approximately 150 Syrian armed forces personnel were in the position at Tal al-Kurum, the majority of them in the immediate vicinity of the observation post towards the bottom of the hill, while a small number continued to come close to the top of the hill and the post to observe opposition-held areas.

25. On several occasions, tank and artillery rounds, small arms and machine gun fire landed close to and inside United Nations positions. On 18 and 25 June, tank rounds landed close to United Nations position 69, and on 12 July an artillery round impacted close to the position. On 13 June, a stray bullet hit observation post 52. On 25 June, small arms fire landed inside position 68, causing damage to the water tank, and on 29 July a stray bullet landed near the position. In the context of the ongoing fighting between the Syrian armed forces and armed members of the opposition and other armed groups in the area of Al-Qahtaniyah, United Nations personnel at observation post 51 frequently observed multiple rounds of machine gun fire and occasionally anti-aircraft fire landing west of the ceasefire line and on numerous occasions in close proximity to the observation post. On 31 May, gunshots hit the observation post, causing slight damage to the building and an armoured vehicle. On 4 July, two tank rounds landed close to the observation post. On a few occasions, small arms fire coming from Al-Qahtaniyah was directed at the observation post, seemingly to deter United Nations personnel from observing the area. Mortar rounds landed in the vicinity of and one inside position 27 on 31 May. On 4 June, two stray bullets were discovered in Camp Ziouani, one of which had penetrated an UNDOF vehicle, causing damage to the windshield and the rear seats. On several occasions, UNDOF personnel at position 60 observed firing in close proximity to the position.

26. There were also incidents involving UNDOF patrols. On 5 July, a routine UNDOF two-vehicle patrol moving from position 80 to position 69 came under fire shortly before reaching position 69, where it had stopped in order to check one vehicle. One motorcycle and one pick-up truck approached from the opposite direction and were about to pass the United Nations patrol when one tank round landed close to the truck, with shrapnel injuring two UNDOF personnel and damaging a United Nations truck. The wounded UNDOF personnel immediately were medically evacuated to the Alpha side and were released from hospital the following day. UNDOF assessed that the tank round was fired from the area of Kammuniyah, an area generally dominated by the Syrian armed forces, in the area of limitation. Owing to the security situation in the vicinity of the incident, UNDOF could not recover the damaged vehicle. UNDOF observed that the vehicle was looted following the incident on 5 July, and was taken away by unidentified individuals during the night of 9-10 July. On 7 July, in the vicinity of Ruihinah village, in proximity to United Nations position 68, a seven-vehicle UNDOF convoy was fired upon with anti-aircraft rounds. There were no injuries to United Nations personnel. One of the United Nations vehicles sustained damage. The convoy was able to return to position 68. UNDOF assessed the fire to have originated from the

area of limitation at Zbedah al-Sharkia, an area generally dominated by the Syrian armed forces. The Senior Syrian Arab Delegate denied any Syrian armed forces involvement in either of the two incidents. In the northern part of the area of limitation, owing to the presence of armed opposition groups in Bayt Jinn and Mazra'at Bayt Jinn and increased fighting between Syrian armed forces and armed members of the opposition, UNDOF continued to re-route its movements to Mount Hermon positions, doubling the travel time in each direction.

27. Throughout the reporting period, the Syrian armed forces maintained a larger number of soldiers and increased their heavy equipment inside the area of separation. They significantly increased their presence, in particular south of the main road between Quneitra in the west and Kahn Arnabeh in the east, and continued to maintain checkpoints inside the area of separation, mainly along the main road. In addition, in some areas Syrian armed forces personnel maintained checkpoints at the eastern entrances to the area of separation, straddling the Bravo line, to control and restrict traffic. Armed opposition groups and other armed groups remained dominant in significant parts of the southern area of separation, maintaining checkpoints and restricting movement in some areas. For most of the reporting period, the Syrian armed forces maintained up to six tanks in the area of separation. UNDOF observed one tank controlled by armed groups moving between the areas of separation and the limitation in the vicinity of Ruihinah, Bir Ajam and Braika. Shortly before fighting broke out in the Quneitra area at the end of August, UNDOF observed some 10 tanks under the control of the Syrian armed forces that were deployed either in the area of separation or in areas immediately adjacent to it. At the same time, UNDOF observed four tanks in the area between Zbedah al-Gharbia and Braika under the control of armed opposition elements. Checkpoints often interfered with the freedom of movement of UNDOF and Observer Group Golan. Restrictions on the movement of UNDOF and Observer Group Golan in the areas of separation and limitation have increased as a result of continuing clashes between the Syrian armed forces and armed members of the opposition and other armed groups, disrupting the supply lines to UNDOF positions in the southern part of the area of separation. The Senior Syrian Arab Delegate advised UNDOF that, for security reasons, all United Nations personnel should avoid areas where clashes were ongoing and that UNDOF should not carry out movements at night.

28. The restrictions of movement and risk to United Nations personnel, owing to the placement of improvised explosive devices alongside roads in the area of separation by armed members of the opposition, remained high. Until the evacuation of the positions at the end of August, UNDOF continued to observe the presence of improvised explosive devices and roadblocks in the vicinity of or on access roads to United Nations positions 27, 60 and 68 and United Nations observation posts 51 and 56 and outpost 32A.

29. UNDOF protested the presence of Syrian armed forces and equipment in the area of separation, the firing into and inside the area of separation and the firing towards United Nations personnel and facilities. The Force Commander reiterated to the Syrian authorities the obligation of the armed forces to halt military operations in the area of separation and to cease firing from the area of limitation, stressing the importance of abiding by the terms of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement and ensuring the safety and security of United Nations personnel on the ground. Senior United Nations officials have conveyed similar messages to the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations.

30. Within this challenging operational environment, and with a view to ensuring its ability to implement its mandate safely and securely, UNDOF supervised the area of separation by manning static positions, conducting around-the-clock observation and conducting patrols along most of the ceasefire line to ensure no breaches of the ceasefire line occurred. In the northern part of the area of separation, UNDOF conducted vehicle patrols, as well as foot patrols on routes that are inaccessible to vehicles. In the southern part of the area of separation, until the events of late August, UNDOF conducted daily patrols to United Nations outposts 85A and 86B, with a view to observing developments in areas from which UNDOF temporarily withdrew its personnel in early 2013. The UNDOF operations continued to be supported by the Observer Group Golan military observers, whose focus of activities was shifted from patrolling and inspection to round-the-clock static observation, investigations and situation analysis. UNDOF, through Observer Group Golan, continues to establish temporary observation posts in several locations along the ceasefire line on the Alpha side several times a week, so as to increase the Force's situational awareness of the area of separation, in particular in the south, where United Nations positions and observation posts have been vacated temporarily owing to the security situation. Through the Observer Group Golan, UNDOF continued to carry out fortnightly inspections of equipment and force levels in the area of limitation on the Alpha side. On several occasions, Observer Group Golan observed several 155 mm artillery weapons deployed in the 10 km zone. Liaison officers from the Alpha side accompanied Observer Group Golan inspection teams. Inspections and mobile operations in the area of limitation on the Bravo side remained suspended because of the security situation. As in the past, the Force faced restrictions on freedom of movement and its inspection teams were denied access to some positions on the Alpha side. Observer Group Golan members continued to experience regular restrictions of movement on the Alpha side when entering and exiting United Nations observation posts 52 and 73, located to the east of the Israeli technical fence. IDF further reduced the number of technical fence crossings for the two observation posts from two to one per day, further limiting the ability of United Nations personnel to carry out vehicle patrols as well as access by contractors to perform enhancement works at the observation posts.

31. As detailed in paragraph 4, as a result of the fighting that erupted on 27 August, which led to the detention of United Nations personnel and the confinement of others in two United Nations positions, UNDOF was forced to leave position 27 and evacuated personnel from positions 60, 68, 69 and 85 as well as observation posts 52 and 56. UNDOF personnel deployed at the Charlie gate at the official crossing between the Alpha and Bravo sides evacuated their position in the early morning of 27 August, when fighting had erupted and was coming close to the area of the gates. Except for observation post 56, around which Syrian armed forces remain deployed, members of armed groups have been seen entering all vacated United Nations positions and looting United Nations equipment and personal items. They also took control of numerous United Nations armoured vehicles. The main effort continued to focus on static activities, combined with an emphasis enhanced situational analysis, reporting and liaising with the parties to prevent situations from escalating. Both parties maintained defensive positions in the respective areas of limitation. Israeli customs officials continued to operate periodically at the IDF post at the UNDOF crossing gate between the Israeli-occupied Golan and the Syrian Arab Republic.

32. In the vicinity of the ceasefire line in the area of separation, mines continued to pose a threat to UNDOF personnel and local inhabitants. Owing to the long-term presence of the mines and the deterioration of their detonation systems, the threat increases as each year passes. On 16 and 30 July, UNDOF observed an explosion at a location where a Syrian armed forces bulldozer was carrying out construction works in the vicinity of observation post 56. On each occasion, the driver was evacuated.

33. The limitations imposed by the security situation on the Bravo side notwithstanding, UNDOF continued its efforts to liaise with local authorities and engage with the local population to explain the mandate and activities of the Force. This remained important in the light of the security situation in the UNDOF area of operation and as part of the effort to ensure the safety and security of United Nations personnel on the ground.

34. On 8 July and 14 August, UNDOF, in cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross, facilitated the crossing of 47 students from the Bravo side to the Alpha side and 33 students from the Alpha side to the Bravo side. UNDOF continued to provide emergency medical treatment to civilians on a strictly humanitarian basis. During periods of intensive fighting between the Syrian armed forces and armed members of the opposition and other armed groups, local inhabitants of areas under fire fled to safer areas in the area of separation and limitation. In late May, civilians from villages in the area of limitation that had come under aerial and artillery attacks fled to two villages in the area of separation in the vicinity of United Nations position 80. Their numbers increased in early June. UNDOF observed approximately 70 small and large tents in the area housing between 200 and 250 individuals. In addition, a total of 34 tents accommodating 170 persons have been set up since late May on the outskirts of al-Rafid village in the area of separation south of position 80. While the number of internally displaced persons in the camps is currently low, UNDOF has learned from persons in the camps that 15,000 individuals registered their names with the camps.

35. As at 2 September, UNDOF comprised 1,271 troops, including 48 women, from Fiji (445), the Philippines (344), India (191), Ireland (134), Nepal (155) and the Netherlands (2). In addition, 81 military observers from the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization, including one woman, assisted the Force in carrying out its tasks.

36. UNDOF continues to adopt and update mitigation measures on the basis of a comprehensive risk assessment carried out by the Force with the support of the Secretariat. During the reporting period, the UNDOF made further enhancements to a number of its vulnerable premises that could be affected by the fighting in the Syrian conflict. The enhancements included adding hardened watchtowers, reinforcing buildings against direct and indirect fire and strengthening perimeter walls and wire fencing. Other mitigation measures, including regular rehearsals of medical evacuations, shelter alerts and other emergency exercises, improved perimeter defence of the Force headquarters and all other positions, and the provision of personal protective equipment to all military and civilian personnel and the necessary training remain in place. The UNDOF counter-improvised explosive device equipment was inducted into the Force and has strengthened the capability of UNDOF to cope with the threat of improvised explosive devices. However, the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic still has not allowed, despite its promises,

the delivery of the remaining counter-improvised explosive device equipment. The overall security situation has rendered it necessary for UNDOF to continue to use, with the cooperation of the relevant authorities, alternative ports of entry and departure for Force personnel.

37. All regular movements of UNDOF personnel on the Bravo side are controlled and continue to be carried out in formed convoys using armoured vehicles. Logistics movements are provided with armed escorts. UNDOF maintains regular armoured convoy movements between Damascus and Camp Faouar to allow all UNDOF national staff whose positions are based at UNDOF headquarters to report to work regularly. A number of national staff whose functions do not necessarily require their presence in Camp Faouar continue to work from the UNDOF office in Damascus, leaving only essential international staff to work in Camp Faouar. The offices of non-essential staff have been relocated to Camp Ziouani, which also serves as an alternate headquarters of the Force. Between 2 and 4 June, in accordance with advisories issued by the United Nations Department of Safety and Security in Damascus, UNDOF froze all movement between Camp Faouar and Damascus as a precautionary measure to prevent incidents in the context of the presidential elections. UNDOF also decided to suspend movement during the same period between the Alpha and Bravo sides. On 3 June, election day, UNDOF placed its reserves on standby in potentially sensitive locations and suspended all movements in the area of operations. Since 27 August, owing to the heavy fighting in the central part of the area of separation, during which control of the Bravo gate fell into the hands of armed groups, UNDOF has suspended movements on the main road between Camp Faouar on the Bravo side and Camp Ziouani on the Alpha side. Further adjustments to the Force's working arrangements will need to be considered if safe movement across the Alpha and Bravo gates cannot be re-established.

III. Implementation of Security Council resolution 338 (1973)

38. The Security Council, when deciding in its resolution 2131 (2013) to renew the mandate of UNDOF for a further period of six months, until 30 June 2014, called upon the parties concerned to immediately implement its resolution 338 (1973) and requested the Secretary-General to submit, at the end of the period, a report on developments in the situation and the measures taken to implement that resolution. The search for a peaceful settlement in the Middle East, in particular the efforts made at various levels to implement resolution 338 (1973), was dealt with in my report on the situation in the Middle East (A/69/341), submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 68/16 on Jerusalem and 68/17 on the Syrian Golan.

39. Since the discontinuation of indirect peace talks in December 2008, there have been no negotiations between the parties. The Syrian conflict is further reducing the prospects for their resumption and progress towards peace between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic. I look forward to a peaceful resolution of the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic and the resumption of efforts towards a comprehensive, just and durable peace settlement, as called for by the Security Council in its resolution 338 (1973) and other relevant resolutions.

IV. Observations

40. I note with deep concern the serious violations of the Disengagement Agreement that have taken place, which resulted, in one instance, in the tragic deaths of an Israeli teenager and Syrian armed forces soldiers, as well as injuries to persons on both sides. This is the result of a significant deterioration of the security situation in the UNDOF area of operation. The firing by Syrian forces across the ceasefire line as well as the Israeli responses with artillery fire and airstrikes jeopardize the maintenance of the ceasefire between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic. It remains critical that both sides work through UNDOF to contain any incidents that occur along or across the ceasefire line. The mandate of UNDOF remains an important element in ensuring the stability of the region.

41. I strongly condemn the forced removal of United Nations personnel from their position and their detention by armed elements, and call for their immediate, unconditional and safe release. I also condemn the confinement of United Nations personnel within their premises under threat of physical violence. Any hostile act against United Nations personnel on the ground, including threatening their physical safety and restricting their movement, the direct and indirect firing at United Nations personnel and facilities and the use of United Nations premises, including those vacated temporarily, by anyone other than United Nations personnel, is unacceptable.

42. The activities of several armed elements, including the al-Nusra Front, in the UNDOF area of operation since late August, and the direct confrontations with United Nations personnel, forced UNDOF to vacate all but one of its positions in the southern area of separation, thereby significantly impacting its ability to carry out its mandate as agreed between the Governments of Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic in the Disengagement of Forces Agreement of 1974.

43. Armed opposition groups and other armed groups have gained control of a large part of the area of separation, including a section of the main road connecting the two UNDOF camps and the crossing between the Alpha and the Bravo sides. It remains critical that countries with influence continue to strongly convey to the armed groups in the UNDOF area of operation the unacceptability of threatening and detaining United Nations peacekeepers and the need to cease any actions that jeopardize the safety and security of United Nations personnel on the ground, including firing at peacekeepers, and to accord United Nations personnel the freedom to carry out their mandate safely and securely. Threats by any person or organization against United Nations personnel are unacceptable.

44. The primary responsibility for the safety and security of United Nations personnel in the areas of separation and limitation on the Bravo side rests with the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic. I note the assistance provided by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic in facilitating the provision of essential supplies in support of the Force to ensure that it continues implementing its mandate safely and securely. It is imperative that respect for the privileges and immunities of UNDOF and its freedom of movement be ensured.

45. There have been numerous incidents involving United Nations personnel on the ground. I am also gravely concerned about United Nations positions caught in crossfire and repeatedly sustaining damage to their infrastructure. The placing of improvised explosive devices by armed groups, especially close to and on access

routes to United Nations positions, remains of great concern. It exposes United Nations peacekeepers on the ground to further risk. The safety and security of UNDOF personnel and Observer Group Golan military observers must be preserved. I remain deeply concerned about the continuing deterioration of the security situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, its impact on the Syrian population and potential implications for the stability of the region. The ongoing military activities in the area of separation and incidents across the ceasefire line have led to periods of heightened tensions between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic and increase the risk to United Nations personnel.

46. Severe and sustained engagements between the Syrian armed forces and armed members of the opposition and other armed groups in close proximity to United Nations personnel and positions are very worrying. The use of heavy weapons by both the Syrian armed forces and armed groups in the continuing Syrian conflict, including air power by Government forces in the area of limitation on the Bravo side, remains disturbing.

47. I am also concerned by the firing of a cluster ammunition round, which, had it exploded and released the sub-munitions, would have indiscriminately endangered the lives of the civilian population in the area, as well as that of United Nations peacekeepers, well beyond the instant it was fired. The use of such ammunition is contrary to the Convention on Cluster Munitions of 2008. There should be no military forces in the area of separation other than those of UNDOF. I note with concern the presence and use of tanks by Syrian armed forces and armed groups in the area of separation. I call upon all parties to the Syrian conflict to cease military actions throughout the country, including in the UNDOF area of operation. I call on the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to stop the use of airstrikes, which cause suffering to the civilian population. I reiterate that all military activities in the area of separation conducted by any actor pose a risk to the ceasefire and to the local civilian population, in addition to the United Nations personnel on the ground.

48. The presence of the Syrian armed forces and unauthorized military equipment in the area of separation, in addition to the firing from the Bravo side across the ceasefire line, are grave violations of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement. All incidents of firing into the area of separation and across the ceasefire line by either party are also grave violations of the Agreement. I stress the importance of all parties to liaise with UNDOF in the first instance to prevent any escalation of the situation. I call upon all parties to take all necessary measures to protect civilians and ensure respect for the safety and security of United Nations personnel, in addition to freedom of movement for UNDOF throughout its area of operation. For its part, the United Nations will spare no effort in ensuring that the long-held ceasefire between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic continues to hold.

49. In view of the critical developments in the UNDOF area of operations, the Force immediately took further measures to adjust temporarily its posture and operations. In accordance with its mandate, UNDOF will continue to use its best efforts to monitor the ceasefire between Syrian and Israeli forces and see that it is observed, albeit in increasingly challenging and difficult circumstances. Given the rapidly evolving and volatile situation in the UNDOF area of operation, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, in consultation with UNDOF, continues to review the Force's operational posture, configuration and activities.

50. The support of the parties and the Security Council is critical as UNDOF continues to adapt to the evolving situation. It is equally critical that the Council continue to bring its influence to bear on the parties concerned to ensure that UNDOF is accorded the ability to operate freely and securely within its area of operation and to carry out its important mandate. It is essential that UNDOF continue to have at its disposal all necessary means and resources, particularly in the light of the volatile security environment. UNDOF also needs to retain the confidence and commitment of troop-contributing countries. I am grateful to the Governments of Fiji, India, Ireland, Nepal, the Netherlands and the Philippines for their contributions to UNDOF and for staying the course under challenging circumstances. In addition, I am grateful to the Member States contributing military observers to the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization. The continued credible presence of UNDOF remains an important element in ensuring stability on the Golan and in the region.

51. In conclusion, I wish to express my appreciation to the Head of Mission and Force Commander, Lieutenant General Iqbal Singh Singha, and to the military and civilian personnel serving under his leadership, who continue to perform with efficiency and commitment, under extremely challenging circumstances, the important tasks assigned to them by the Security Council. I have full confidence that UNDOF will continue to use its best efforts to carry out its mandate.